

Riders of Berk Remix

by inhonoredglory

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Summary: What if RoB were not restricted to animation budgets, a short time slot, and Cartoon Network? What if we knew the thoughts behind characters' actions? This story was borne from analysis of RoB and how it fits (and doesn't fit) into the HTTYD universe. A character-driven retelling of the plotlines from RoB. (Please read the first chapter description of this story's purpose. Thanks!)

1. Author's Note: Explanation of Story

****a/n Please Read First****: _an explanation of why I began these episode rewrites_

Dragons: Riders of Berk, for as much good as it's had, has a few things that have bugged me throughout its first season. I wouldn't have minded except when I found myself doing arguments on certain characters being taken irritatedly out-of-character. But my gab wouldn't mean very much unless I knew what the movie's characters would actually do in the situations RoB put them into.

So this fanfiction is mostly an exploration. This is partly for fun, and partly for me to see how Hiccup and the gang would do if they were not restricted to precise plots, limited animation, and forced comedy that stretched believability. I want to make clear that I do not hate RoB, but I'm sometimes a bit of a "glass is half empty" sort of person, so I end up focusing on the faults sometimes, especially if it concerns my favorite characters whom I respect so highly. A couple pointers about this series of stories:

-I have a lot of respect for the arcs they do have in RoB, and for the work it takes to put a cohesive, entertaining plot in 22 minutes, which touches on all of the characters and has a good theme and great jokes. In this rewrite, I don't pretend to match RoB's mood or its completeness in that sense.

-This is not a word-for-word/band-aid rewriting, nor is it a script. It's heavily narrative, uses all the capabilities of narrative format, including thoughts, which I realize cannot be used in a TV show. Here the line blurs between my desires for the TV episode and my plain old exploration of what-if.

-This is not just a critique on RoB, it's an exploration for me on our character's thoughts and motives, and already I've learned quite a bit, not only about the characters, but how RoB does and can make sense, given the right arcs and explanations (and headcanons LOL). Writing this actually helped me believe RoB more.

-Not all changes are because I didn't like something or thought it was OOC. In fact some scenes which I think are just fine aren't included, because I'm focusing on the story angle and especially Hiccup's growth, and his friendship with Toothless. Plus writing word-for-word is pretty boring in itself, and I won't subject you or me to a copied transcript. I'm also not trying to make this Grade A perfect writing, so there's going to be some cuts just to make things easier for me and to keep narrative flow.

-Last of all I'm not saying that making RoB the way I wrote it here would make it necessarily a better episode. RoB does a great job of giving screen time to a lot of minor characters that I have not. It also does comedy much better. My focus here is character growth and relationships, hence the changes.

But most of all, just have fun with this, as I had fun with it! Any huge changes are probably because I was irked by something, and hopefully by my adjustments you can see the reasons why. Maybe it would help you see RoB in terms of the HTTYD timeline better, maybe it can smooth the road between the movie and the series, as it is doing for me.

Cheers and happy reading!

2. 101: How to Start a Dragon Academy

a/n: As the summary states, this is an exploration. You can watch the initial episode at the Database page of my Tumblr website (username ***inhonoredglory***). I also like to think I added more Hiccup/Stoick, Hiccup/Stoick, and Hiccup/Toothless in this than in the original episode.

Summary of this chapter: Hiccup faces responsibility and the challenge of violent dragons coexisting with humans.

>Primary questions for this rewrite: How does Hiccup end up leading the kids? Why do the Hooligans so readily agree to send the dragons off Berk? Why are the dragons suddenly violent and unruly? How does Hiccup feel about the change of his life? Who *is* Mildew anyway?

* * *

><p>RoB Remix 1.01
How to Start a Dragon Academy**

_The past is another land, and we cannot go to visit. So, if I say there were dragons, and men who rode upon their backs, who alive has been there and can tell me that I'm wrong? _-Cressida Cowell

You may have heard of me. Short, dorky kid, son of the Chief, general failure and disappointment, Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the Third. If you talked to Gobber you might have got out of him that I make stuff. He's the only one who semi-tolerated my, well what you could call, _hobbies_. But it's been around four months since that time, since I woke up one day and everything was going right in my world and the War was over. But real life isn't fantasy and there are still some challenges we got, among ourselves and with the dragons. Ever since it got around that I trained a Night Fury, and _after_ my Dad reinstated me into the tribe, after they got around to seeing that dragons aren't necessarily dangerous, my life more or less changed. I guess you can call it becoming a Hero. I don't really like that term, because then they keep thinking I'm going to go do something legendary every five seconds. But I _have_ _been_ getting more attention now. People don't laugh at me for the smallest mistake I make, the other kids on the island don't judge me as a wimp and a joke. Vikings aren't big on love, but I could tell there's been a couple passes at me. I had no idea what to do with them, because it's been my whole life I'd gone without so much as a glance from a girl. I mean, Ruffnut is cute, and the Hastein girls are kind of pretty, even if they _are_ a little young for someone my age. But I got this turtle thing that goes on when girls look at me. Except Astrid, but she doesn't do passes. She'll just whack me randomly when I smile at her. (And it's with a smile on her face, so no, I'm not too worried. But try telling that to my arm.)

And the boys . . . well, yeah, it's no secret I'm no muscle man. Being a Hero didn't change that unfortunately. They didn't really like it when I tried to join the village matches of _glÃ-ma_ or _toga hÃnk_. I know, I'm stupid to try wrestling, even if it's just to get on with the gang. It's still embarrassing to lose, but especially _after_ everyone starts thinking you might actually make an acceptable Viking chief like your Dad one day.

But I do good on board games, _hnefatafl_ and _skÃktafl_, and a couple other games I invented. I kind of always did well there, more mental you know, even before, when I played with Fishlegs. He's the only kid who had an honest smile on his face when I asked him to play with me. Of course that was earlier, before Snotlout got on his tail and teased him for associating with Useless (man, I hated that nickname). I still play with Gobber, but now my father's been trying to sit down and play with me more often. He's been taking more of an interest in what I'm doing nowadays, serious interest. Asking me about how my day was while we're eating dinner, asking me about the dragons, how I was with the kids, if Gobber treated me good at the smith. We've had longer talks at home, and I can tell he's making more of an effort at being honest and open with me. It's weird sometimes, because I've gotten so used to being on my own. I have to stop myself from making excuses about what I was doing. But the man's trying, and I'm trying too. Like I said, everything got better after what happened.

And Toothless. Yeah, I don't really have words for Toothless. He's just the best. He's always poking his head in my stuff, wondering what I'm up to. I got him trained to ease down on the flying, so I could get around to the new responsibilities my Dad gave me. But I try to make it a point to get in at least five hours flying a day, because dragons are naturally flying creatures and I got to adjust to Toothless. (Plus it's a great excuse to get out of awkward

situations, which is sort of like, _all the time._) It's nice to get alone with him in the big sky and talk to him. Sometimes I think he can actually understand me, I like to think he does, when he grunts and snorts at my jokes. I go to the Cove almost every day, and we play in the water and draw in the sand. Or more like, Toothless grabs a tree and pretends to doodle and ends up smashing into me and attacking me with slobber. That's what the dip in the lake is for afterwards. Dragon saliva is not a pretty sight. It's warm and sticky and smells like raw fish, and when I did get back to town once without washing up first, even Ruff and Tuff kept their distance. I may or may not have shouted "I am the dragon boy!" at the top of my lungs when that happened. Maybe dragon spit makes you more manly, I don't know.

There are kids in the town, the toddlers and six-year-olds, who come to me and ask about my story. There's this one kiddie, about three maybe, Ivan, who wants to follow me around and fly on Toothless whenever I get to the part where I'm attacking the monster dragon (Dad eventually got around to officially naming it for the histories, I think he went with Red Death). I let him fly with me on Toothless of course, and the kid would scream out for the Red Death's head and pretend he's me. It fits, too, because the kid was born with a bum right leg, so maybe he relates to my situation.

Speaking of my leg, I'm good with it. It gets weird on me every once in a while and I get these pains in there as if my real leg were still around. It freaked me out, especially the first couple weeks, and that's when you really appreciate a guy like Gobber to be around telling you jokes about it. I don't really like to take it off because it's such a pain to screw it back on again, but Gobber advised it was better to be tidy with it and try to get more nights in sleeping with it off. I have a regiment of scrubbing down the metal before I go to sleep. I also wash Toothless' tail every couple days, and try to take off his rigging every night. I get lazy sometimes and forget, but it's really better for him to go without all that junk on him when he's asleep. I also wipe down the saddle and the stirrups, before I rub him down for the night. Dad says I spoil that dragon, that we're Vikings and we should all just rough it. But Toothless appreciates it, and that's what matters. I love hearing him outside of my room as I go to sleep, growling on the roof, or snoring at the side of the house when he's not in the stables. He tried to sleep inside next to me a couple times, but Dad says that he spent days trying to redecorate the place when I was unconscious after the Battle of the Red Death, because Toothless would make a mess of everything whenever he got excited or just jumped around. Dad tolerated it when I was under, but now that I'm okay, he doesn't want to spend his time cleaning up after Toothless. Sort of my job anyway.

I came back from flying one day when it was windy. It was one of those days I was afraid of getting a cold flying over the ocean in the evening. Rough clouds, Toothless was so excited. Animals know when a storm is coming, and dragons I think are particularly keen, seeing how they have to fly in the weather, whatever it is. Toothless loves a storm, and I have a feeling he likes to fly in them and tease the lightning. The Night Fury legend _did_ begin with a fierce lightning storm, when a hundred strong men died by the hand of a mysterious creature that was borne from the lightning. I don't know _how_ I managed to train a creature with that reputation. Call me rash.

Dad pulled me over just as the storm started to have lightning, sat me down at the table and took a gulp of meade from his tankard. "Son," he said, and I could tell that this was going to be a big deal. He always got that heaviness in his voice whenever he was about to get serious. "I think you need to start making some changes . . . in the way you do things." He looked at me and pushed his mug across the table to me.

"Um, like replacing my normal boring refreshments with alcohol?" I peered down into the tankard.

"No, son," he laughed, standing up and patting his big hand on my shoulder. "I mean taking charge, being responsible for something."

"I've got the apprenticeship, and everybody's always coming to me with their dragon problems, already. I'm kind of, you know . . . busy."

But when my Dad has something in mind, negotiations don't usually go anywhere. That's what being a chief does to you. Besides how else did he get the reputation around the Archipelago that he wasn't someone to play games with? Berk averted a lot of wars with my father at the helm. It's not like a lot of people could brag like he did about the number of dragons he's killed in his lifetime. He's not someone to mess around with. Least of all by me. Even after I proved him wrong about dragons, it didn't mean I had a say in other issues.

"Listen, son, I won't put you into something you can't handle."

"_Thanks_, Dad." I might have been sarcastic there, you tell me.

"I want you to guide the other dragon-owning teenagers in dragon, well dragon- whatever it is you do with them. I want you to share what you have with Toothless with them. It'd be good for the tribe."

I swallowed and fingered the mug in front of me.

"I want you to lead them."

This was a pretty big step for my Dad, to trust me like this. It wasn't like he was ignorant to how much the teens respected me in my childhood. The other kids might have accepted me enough not to insult me to my face, might have admired me enough for killing a monster, but to direct them? I was laughing in my head. Sure, Snotlout would really love that, and the twins - they might be more of a problem for me than anyone. Fishlegs wouldn't mind. I'd really gotten to know him ever since the change happened, and he just eats it up the way I want to learn all he knows about dragons from Bork's notes. And Astrid . . . wow, that was going to be tough. She's got a bit of a head, you know, but maybe she'll appreciate my stepping up? Like, I'm going to be her chief one day.

Just ignore how awkward that came out in my head.

I couldn't not agree, so I said I'd make up some plans, design a couple lessons in dragon bonding. It couldn't be that hard. Dad was

going to announce to the other kids that I was going to be having a job for them. But I told him, no, if I was going to do something like this, I might as well tell them too. So I got the kids together in the Great Hall one day, the ones who were recruits for dragon fighting - Snotlout, the twins Ruffnut and Tuffnut, Fishlegs, and Astrid. "You all are going to be . . . under me-" I swallowed. "-to learn how to bond with your personal dragon." I smiled, hoping to put them off guard. Even though I knew it wouldn't faze them a second if they didn't like the idea.

"And who put you in charge all of a sudden?" It came from a bunch of voices, Snotlout's loudest of all.

"The chief," I pointed out, watching my words, bracing myself. Astrid stepped up to my defense when I said that, mostly because she had a ton of respect for the chief, and for me. At least she didn't disregard me right away, at least gave an ear to what I had to say.

"Wait, let's hear him out," she said, holding a hand out and stepping up to me. "What do you mean, Hiccup?"

"Uhh, my Dad wants me to share with you guys what I know about dragons. I call them bonding exercises. It's going to be fun, guys!"

Astrid pushed her bangs aside, let the blonde hair fall back on her forehead. She paused a long second and took me in with her eyes. So, was that a yes or a no?

"Okay," she said slowly, still watching me, and then she eyed the group behind her. Her word still had the go around here. Guess maybe that was something I had to work on? If my Dad wanted me to be able to command these kids eventually, if that's what he had in mind putting me in this position, he sure had another thing coming. This was an uphill battle. But he had faith in me, and I wasn't about to let him down now.

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That's kind of how it started, how I got to spending more of my day creating interesting lessons for my peers, spending time with them, flying with them. It taxed me, a lot. I would eat up a good five hours or more of the day keeping their dragons in check, telling them how to do things, leading formations, showing them how to do something and hoping they'd follow suit. My legs would be tired of flying and my brain would be tired of talking by the time I got home and I'd hole away into my room to rest, but then Toothless would wake me up and demand to go flying alone, because I think even he doesn't care much about sharing the spotlight of my attention with four other dragons and a bunch of people. I'd drag my behind out of what already wasn't the most comfortable bed and take another two-, three-hour spin on Toothless before I really got home, and then I went and worked with Gobber at the shop. There's not as much immediate demand for weapons with the constant dragon raids gone, but there's still plenty of things a blacksmith can do, forging farm tools, wagon wheels, raiding armor, ship nails, coats of mail, housing materials, the list goes on. It's there in town that I got wind of the other dragon problems we had. Apparently it's not just all about bonding and being friendly.

It's been months since dragons raided the village. But peace for a dragon isn't the most welcomed way of life. They like to flex their muscles, ruffle their egos, get into fights. We'd dealt with it pretty well for a while, but there's always someone to set the village on edge again. For this situation, that man was Mildew Renouf, son of IngÅ³lfr Renouf, one of our tribe's most respected elders of the past.

Mildew's a guy nobody likes. It's kind of sad and sometimes I feel sorry for him. He's an outcast essentially. He used to be one of Berk's elders, like his father, up there with Gothi, giving out advice, warnings, keeping the histories . . . predicting the weather. His mind sort of went out on him one day and he went through a period where he got himself married three times, one after the other, each bride dying in terrible accidents from which Mildew himself was unscathed. The suspicion was enough for the village, Gothi, and my Dad to kick him out of his position and banish him to the other side of the island. He had proof that he didn't murder his wives, but was the tribe going to believe that?

He's pretty much living out his days as the village sore thumb. We try to tolerate him, we listen to his complaints about his crops and his livestock, and then we send him away, back up to where he belongs. I've talked to him once in a while, when he came down to sell his goods. I thought maybe we could relate to one another, both of us being sort of looked down upon by everyone. But he was always bitter, always angry, and I couldn't really connect to that. He didn't want to believe that things could change, he didn't want to hope.

Even after me and Toothless changed this place, and I thought maybe he'd see how things can be made different, he was still the same. He came down to the village one day, complaining that the dragons were a nuisance, destroying houses and setting the town on fire. I mean, he had a point. The day before there was a melee of reptiles in the plaza, ganging up on one another, and a couple of my cousins had to room in each other's houses as their own homes were being rebuilt. Standing just in the middle there, with the burning planks of wood and the sticky remnants of dragon saliva, and the charred talon scratches on the stone center, one would think the dragon raids had never ended.

But that's where Mildew went too far. "You need to cage them up or they'll eat us out of house and home." He pounded his staff in front of my Dad and a growing crowd.

I'm not one to speak up in village business, especially when it's my father the man is talking to, and if I do, it's usually something sarcastic or demeaning, meant for my own entertainment or just because I generally put my foot in places it doesn't belong. But when it came to dragons, and threatening to imprison them just because they're being who they are- I stepped in front of my Dad and made a case to the village. "They don't mean any harm. They're just dragons being . . . dragons."

Mildew looked at me, pounded his old elder's staff into the ground. "Exactly. And that's why we need to get rid of them." He stalked off, without a second's glance back. He was getting people on his side, people who were tired of cleaning up after these wild

creatures. "It's not like we're going to throw them out," they said, "just calm them down a little."

"For a couple days, that's all."

"Until they learn their place."

That's what my Dad said, too, back home that night, discussing the problem with Gobber. I was outside, on the steps by the front door, stroking Toothless, but I could hear them, and I knew my Dad wasn't going to make the right decision. He didn't know dragons, not the way I wanted to. It wouldn't be like him to just believe Mildew or the whims of the people, but this was months in the making, and I guess he couldn't just ignore it anymore. Maybe I should have done something sooner. It's not like we weren't used to houses burning here, or general destruction. I thought we were Vikings, and we could live with things like that. As long as dragons weren't out to kill us, weren't they tolerable? I didn't want to see them caged, not just because it was mean, but it could so easily lead to something bigger, like permanent imprisonment, or worse, scaring them off the island again, by force. It was a possibility, if they didn't behave.

"It's unfortunate that Mildew had to be the one to bring this up," I could hear Dad say inside, to Gobber. Toothless curled his tail around me, sloping his body on the stone steps. He was ready to sleep, and as tempting as it was to slip into the crook of the dragon's body and spend the night outside with him, as I'd done before, I had to go in there and do something. "Bud, just hold on a second, okay?"

Toothless purred, nudged his head up at me. I slipped out of his curve and pulled open the front door to my house. "Dad--"

He turned, and I could read frustration in his face. "Dad, I could fix this. I know dragons, I could deal with them."

Gobber went scraping at his wooden carving, a white wooden hnefatafl king piece. I stared at him, tried to give him one of those Astrid looks. Come on, help me here.

My father shook his head. I stepped up to him, watched his face closely as the fire lit and danced on his beard. "Dad, you wanted me to take on responsibility, right? And I . . . I want to step up for this." I firmed my jaw and stood straight. A moment passed between us, and Dad watched me, taking me in. I kept my ground, and he sighed, looked back to Gobber, who shrugged and gave him a gentle affirmative. He turned back and patted my shoulder. "Okay, son, this is your job."

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The next day I got up before Toothless could wake me up. It was dark and I could hear the hum and purr of early-waking dragons in the air somewhere beyond the house. I wanted to jump out and get going, but I pulled my legs off the bed and fell flat on the floor, cringing because I could have waken up my Dad with that. I'd forgotten that I'd been a good boy the night before, had taken off my prosthetic. Darn thing, I hissed and hastily grappled for it on my dresser, slapped it on and jammed in tight the metal pin. It hurt this early

in the morning, I guess it does a little every time I put it on. I grabbed my bearskin vest, slapped my helmet on my head, and tried my best to tiptoe out of the house. Dad was still asleep, snoring, in the far end of the house, the blankets on the floor, as usual. I guess it's safe to say Vikings are deep sleepers.

I slipped outside, ran around to where I could see Toothless on the roof, his black body heaving gently against the sharp morning light that was fast coming out.

"Toothless!" I called, half a whisper, half a shout.

The dragon perked, eyed me suspiciously.

"I need your help." I put my hands out.

Toothless narrowed his eyes, sniffed.

"Bud, there's nothing up okay? I just need to get out to the plaza and train a couple dragons. You can help me!"

Toothless shook his head, curled around into his ball of sleep.

"Ugh!"

The dragon flapped his single tail over his face for good measure.

I threw my hands up. "Well there's no flying for you this morning anyway, so have it your way, sleepyhead."

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The plaza was a mess by the time I got there. It really seemed worse than before. Nightmares growling at each other, a pair of Zipplebacks facing down a Nadder, Gronckles throwing flaming balls of fire into random houses. What was it with these dragons all of a sudden? Sometimes I had a feeling they just got bored being at peace. Maybe dragons were more like Ruff and Tuff after all. A clan of Terrible Terrors were swooping through a small food supply barn and I shook my head. That couldn't be good.

One dragon at a time, Hiccup, one dragon at a time . . .

I found a Nadder terrorizing a woman, and I shouted to him. He turned around and I stepped up towards him, put a calm determination in my voice and put my hands out. "It's okay, just calm down, it's going to be all right." The dragon soothed, and I reached for him, patted his snout gently. It was going just great until a squawk of chickens collided into us, and I fell, watched the Nadder fly up. Turning behind me, I could see a fresh blaze erupt in one of the houses, one of the ones being rebuilt. I got to my feet, was run over by some other dragon, a Nightmare, clawing its way up the plaza, towards the fire. There was a terrible hum of Terrors in my head, and the freakish squeal of chickens and people. I cowered into my arms for a moment, and suddenly a warm nose shoved my side and I looked out, saw Toothless nosing me determinedly. The dragon was eyeing me like he was disappointed or something. "Hey, what got you so interested in my problems all of a sudden?" He dragged me to my feet, and I threw myself over Toothless' back. He hummed back, sharply, and ran, for

the fire and the mess of Nightmares fighting each other on the rooftops.

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It was dark by the time I got home. I hadn't flown on Toothless all day, hadn't met up with the teens for lessons, hadn't hardly spoken with Dad, hadn't barely eaten except the apples that were rolling around the plaza as I tried in vain to train every. Single. Dragon. On the island. It didn't work. Sure I got to some, got them quiet for a while, but there was no one to watch out for them and they mostly just got back to being their old wild selves. It was frustrating. But I couldn't give up, not with the promise I'd made Dad.

I rubbed down Toothless, promised him I'd go flying some time that night. He nudged his nose into me, hummed like maybe he understood that I was too tired for that? I felt bad for not riding him at least some time in the madness. But I needed a couple hours of shut-eye before I did anything strenuous. I needed a couple hours without the leg, it was hurting again, what with all the running and tripping, and the ghost of my left leg was complaining out in its phantom reality. I crawled up to my room - my father luckily wasn't in - and threw myself over on the bed, my back on the boards and excuse of a blanket. I pulled my leg up over me, unscrewed my prosthetic and threw it lankily into the corner of the room. My body ached all over and I just wanted to sleep. I let out a breath and rolled over, pushed my head into the coarse cloth of my pillow.

There were footfalls suddenly and my eyes shot open. It was Astrid, I could tell from the sound, and I cursed under my breath, rolled over and fell off the bed on the other side. Of all the times to throw that leg into the corner. I felt like a fish there swimming after my leg on the floor in the dark.

"Hiccup?"

There. Found it. "Um, Astrid?" I slapped the thing on, jammed the screw into my leg and turned. "Astrid! Hey!" I jumped up and smoothed out my vest. "Hey Astrid, hi." My wave must have looked really corny because she shook her head and crossed her arms. "How was your day?" Her question was so nuanced. "Uneventful?" I proposed. She shook her head, looked over my vest and brushed off a corner of my shoulder. "We noticed. It's hard to believe you're still standing." She eyed me critically, those blue eyes looking right through my lies. She narrowed her eyes, and I knew she had me.

"Okay, fine. The whole dragon-training thing didn't work." I threw up my hands, sat down on my bed and pulled my left leg over my right, pulled out the prosthetic again. "But I'll make it work tomorrow, trust me." I dropped the leg on the floor and flopped down on the pillow. I was way too tired to argue, and I was sure she had something up her sleeve. She crossed her arms again, angled her hips in that way which made her so . . . attractive. There wasn't really a better word for it right now. I watched her from my bed, thought about how cool it was she came by to ask me stuff.

"It's your Dad, Hiccup, he's been covering for you all day, and I for one don't think it's working."

She was so pretty when she was mad. "It'll be fine, Astrid," I

cooed.

"Hiccup, I don't think you're getting what I'm saying."

"No, seriously, it's going to be fine. Just tell Dad that I- I, uh. That this is just the first phase of my Fiendishly Clever Plan." I smiled, pulled the blanket up to cover me.

Astrid rolled her eyes. "That's not going to fly."

"Is that a dragon joke?"

"Hiccup, stop getting off topic."

But I was laughing already, rolled over and snuggled into my blanket.

"You're going to make me do everything around here, aren't you? There's a very real possibility of the dragons here getting caged up. Doesn't that worry you?" She pulled violently at my left arm, rolled me over to face her.

I exhaled forcefully. "Okay, Astrid . . ." I sighed. "Listen-" I threw the blanket off and sat up, hung my feet over the edge. "Of course I know it's serious. Who do you think went around all day trying to train every dragon in the island?" I slapped my hand over my face, grunted into my palm. It was the curse of the Lone Hero. Everyone out expecting he can change the world.

But . . . maybe that was my problem? I might have told Dad I wanted to fix this, but "fixing this" didn't mean I had to do it on my own, did it?

Astrid spread her skirt out, sat on the bed to my right and patted my knee. I peeked at her between my fingers suddenly, slid my hand off my face. "I can use your help," I said. She raised a brow. "You could say that again."

"No, no, no, I mean in dragon training!" I was getting excited now. "You and the other teens can help me train the dragons here to stop fighting. We could get everyone involved. We could do this!" I pumped my fist into my other palm, gaped at her. She stared at me awkwardly. But my mind was spinning fast now. Not only would this work to get the teens under my command, but it would fix the dragon problem, get people bonded with dragons. Maybe this was even bigger than the teens, if everyone on Berk could make each dragon their own, tend to him and take care of him-

"I need to outline this," I gasped and reached past her, for my sketchbook on the dresser. I pulled out the charcoal and made random diagrams as my brain worked. I could hear Astrid sighing in the background, standing up and heading for the stairs. "Should I tell the kids tomorrow?"

"No." I looked up suddenly. "No, I'll do that."

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Breakfast the next day with Dad was a little off kilter somehow, and I suspect I tucked into my shell again that time when I realized

something was bothering Dad. One thing I learned in my sixteen years is that if he's upset about something you don't go prying into the subject.

"I hope you have a better plan than yesterday," he said suddenly, without looking at me.

A sting of embarrassment flushed over my face. "Um, yeah I do have a plan."

"Well then get on with it," he said, curtly.

I left the house with that same feeling, glad I was out of Dad's sight, and worried that maybe my show yesterday was like Astrid said, too much for him to cover. Was that what was bothering him? I hoped not.

I conveniently ignored those feelings, remembered what Dad said about feelings and leadership. This plan was going to work, and I headed for the kids' houses, intending to round them up at the Kill Ring. I brought Toothless with me, since he was still hanging onto me when I left the house. Apparently the two hours flying before breakfast wasn't enough for him.

The twins didn't exactly like the idea of being dragged out of their home to go "dragon training." They were busy concocting death-defying tricks on one another, but Fishlegs was pretty excited to get on with my plan. He knew his geekiness would be appreciated in this kind of situation. I think the fact that he's a year and half younger than me helped with the fact that he didn't mind following along my suggestions. Astrid tagged behind me, and I had this sneaking notion she was trying to prop me up against the kids. With Snotlout, it actually might have helped. He wore a wicked scowl the moment I showed up on his doorstep, apparently waking him from some kind of power nap, as he termed it. "This better be good, Hiccup," he snarled, following me through town. I didn't look at him, knew that if I did he'd only lord his face over me, and I was in no mood for him to insult his way into mutiny on my first serious assignment for him. He'd never liked me, and even though he was on my side when I was the dragon-training Hero, I think the constant praise that drowned me made him realize he wasn't quite the big shot he used to be.

Long story short, the two of us were just about at square one again.

I finally got all the kids together, around midmorning. Entering the Kill Ring with Toothless brought back a couple memories, even if it had been several months since that fateful day. I don't think anyone had entered this place since that time, and I could even spot a gathering of dust and sand in the corners of the rocks and the crack running down the center. Why my choice of the Kill Ring?

For one thing it was secluded. I wasn't about to go running madly around the town failing in front of everyone. If this didn't work, it wouldn't be half as embarrassing. For another, well . . . my plan was to mass train the dragons on Berk, even the ones who didn't have riders. It was a big affair, and someone in charge needs a headquarters. And what better place than this to undo everything we did during the War?

"And that's your plan? Training dragons--"

"Where we used to kill them?"

I turned around to face the five kids behind me. "Yep." I sighed. "But we don't do that anymore, and that's why it's here gathering dust." I kicked a dry plume of stubborn gathered plant matter. I looked at them, took a deep breath. The Kill Ring was a glorious place, my Dad built it that way. He built it to be the best dragon killing arena on the Archipelago, not just because his best friend was Gobber who had trained generation after generation of Viking warriors, but because, as he told me once a long time ago (before he realized how much I would fail in that department), he wanted me to follow in his footsteps and be the land's best dragon killer this side of my great-great grandfather Grimbeard the Ghastly. "It's the best I can do for my son, the hope and heir to this great tribe."

Of course that was a long time ago, and the arena now was getting old, a bit purposeless in the loss of its reason for existing.

"Everybody, here's the thing," I spoke up, raising my voice. "The dragons are out of control. We want them to live in our world without destroying it, but they can't without our help. They're violent, they're destroying our homes--"

"_Thank you_ for making them all live with us."

I glanced up, saw Snotlout's snarky face glaring at me. Astrid leered at him and watched me, as I balled my fist and ignored him, continued my speech. "They're violent right now, they got nothing to do and take out all that excess energy on."

"Oh I got it!" Tuffnut yelled suddenly. "Help dragons blow stuff up." He slapped a palm to his sister's. "We can totally do that."

"No! That's not--"

"First we'll make them really angry." Ruffnut.

"Not a problem. We make everyone angry." Tuffnut.

Astrid was watching me, calmly, coolly. "Guys, stop!" I yelled, not a yell really but something on the higher register. Astrid kept staring and I figured out she was analyzing me. For what I don't know. I didn't have time to think of that now. "This is serious," I punched my fist into the air. "There's a real possibility of our dragons being caged, maybe even forced off the island, and I don't know about you, but that's not okay with me."

Tuffnut put on a sour face. He bit his lip and shrugged. "Fine, you're right. She's sorry."

Ruffnut shoved his helmet over his forehead.

I rolled my eyes and put my hands behind and under my tunic, reaching for the papers I'd put under my belt. "Now, guys." I unfurled the papers, read them. "This is important. This is everything I know about dragons."

Fishlegs looked at me hopefully.

"Well not _everything_. _I don't know as much as Fishlegs knows-"

The boy smiled.

"But I _do_ know how to train them." I swallowed, looked down at the words I'd written the day before. "Dragons need understanding and respect. They're dangerous creatures, and it's not like them to be restricted like this. They need freedom, to some extent, and they need guidance. One person can't train them all-"

Snotlout chuckled, and I firmed my jaw, kept reading. "But each person on this island _can_ tame his own dragon and help give an example to the others who live with us here. I believe that we can start making this possible, and with your help-" I folded the paper and looked at my group. "We can get this job done."

"And the arena?" Astrid stepped up to me, swinging her hair to glance up at the metal net above.

"What about it?"

"Does your Dad know you're just taking it?"

I bit my lip. I hadn't really thought of telling him what I had planned, maybe because I wasn't sure the kids would follow through with it, or if it was such a good idea at all. I didn't think he'd mind my using the Ring, but the way Astrid put it made me wonder. "Yeah . . . ?"

She narrowed her eyes at me, critical, and I slipped away from her, shielding her with my arm. "Oookay, let's get going, gang!" I called and headed out for the village. "We'll collect a bunch of dragons first and get them all trained up by the day's end, okay?"

"Whatever you say, boss," smirked Snotlout.

I somehow felt like this could have got off to a better start.

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The kids and I got to the village after lunch to find the sound of dragon fire exploding out of the far upper corner of the village. It was hot, angry, and I knew it was trouble. "Whoa that fast?" Astrid yelled, as she ran towards the sound of the fire. The twins were commenting joyously on the gorgeousness of the flames as I tripped on my prosthetic, trying to keep pace with the others. I winced, the socket of the prosthetic shoving up harshly into my leg. But I sucked it in, kept running. I had run more than a few times on the thing in the past couple months and I felt like I was making good progress on getting back to some kind of normal running ability. As much as the thing . . . told me . . . not . . . to. I heaved a breath and hopped the last way, as we reached the ramp that led up to that region of town.

Everyone was ahead of me, except Fishlegs who hung behind and asked if I was okay. "Yeah, I'm fine," I snapped and dashed up the wooden walkway.

The scene above there was madness. Like yesterday except worse, because this was the winter food supply they were attacking, burning, those thin dragon bodies writhing and hissing at one another, alive with the life and wild fury of free dragons. We'd just completed filling that thing the day before, what with Bucket and Mulch's new catch and the fresh meat that was hanging neatly drying in the rafters. The fire and screaming would have been thrilling were it not such a mess. I could see the eaten remains of smoked fish and drying lamb legs thrown around the floor, the scorched ends of the boards of the building. A Monstrous Nightmare turned towards us suddenly, and Snotlout besides me gave a gasp. "Hookfang?" he shouted, shocked. His dragon slurped up a fish and slid off to attack another pile of food.

"Stormfly-"

I whirled, saw Astrid, her voice angry and shocked at once as she watched her own dragon flapping cheerfully in the melee of Viking rations. I saw my Dad, in the harried midst of several other angry villagers, waving his sword at the flying creatures, his voice thick with a war cry and frustration. I yelled, knew he couldn't be serious with that weapon, and ran to him, collided into his back.

"_Hiccup_-"

"Dad, I-"

"Hiccup, your plan isn't working. Look what they've done now."

I opened my mouth, but then Mildew's voice came over the sound of fire and breaking wood. Dad looked up, held his weapon to his side.

"I warned you, Stoick, but did you listen to me? _No_. You put a bunch of _teenagers_ in charge."

I turned around to face him, that wrinkled stick of a man. He was glaring at my group with a thin lisp in his hateful eye. "You think caging is too good for these beasts? You can't train the violence out of them. They're _dragons_, they're gonna do what a dragon's gonna do. Look at that-" He pointed his long, thin finger to a segment of the burning wreckage. "Just because one dragon changed once means _nothing_."

I looked to where Mildew pointed, found Toothless there, slipping fish into his throat, a gummy innocence in his discovery of the tasteful fish. I gasped. _Toothless!_ Mildew hissed on, closer this time, right by my own ear. "Look at your precious Night Fury, a wild, selfish _pest_ like the rest of them."

I snapped my head to face that man, my blood boiling.

Dad's voice shouted suddenly, to me. "Hiccup, cage them up."

Mildew was laughing, that horrible grinning smile on his face before I turned to face my father. "No - you got to listen to me." He started walking away, away from the fire and the dragons that were still terrorizing the food supply. "Dad-" I chased after him.

"Listen, I know dragons better than-"

"Better than what?" He whirled back. "Better than me? Those creatures still got wild blood in them, and we've lived hundreds of years knowing that."

"But they know we're not a threat."

"We worked six months to get that supply stocked."

"We can do it again!"

"That's not how survival works, Hiccup."

"But caging them now would only-"

"Teach them a lesson. Get the big dragons of this herd, get the leader dragons and throw them into those cages in the Ring. I want them punished for this."

I flinched. Dad was hardly this angry, but he was fuming now. I looked past him, saw Mildew soaking it in, stroking his staff, licking his lips wickedly and staring at me. I firmed my jaw, looked back at Dad. Maybe because it was hard for him to agree to something Mildew of all people suggested. Maybe he was sick of dragons after all. Maybe the months of peace meant nothing to him. Maybe he was tired of my being right about dragons all along?

He locked those steel eyes on me, and I felt small suddenly. He depended on me, but I didn't let him down. We didn't have a chance to let him down. "That's an order, son," he said, regardless, a weight in his voice. "Carry it out. You start with Toothless. Now."

My lower lip shoved up and I watched him walk away, waving Gobber off, that frustration tangible in the shake of his big arm. Someone leaned next to me suddenly, whispered. "These dragons don't belong on this island," Mildew hissed, his parched, dry lips close to my eyes. "They'll be gone from here soon, like they deserve, don't worry your pretty head about that."

I lisped back, my jaw tense. "Why are you doing this?" I spat.

His eyes took me in and he cackled a laugh, his chuckle getting louder and carefree into the cool Berk air. He shook his head and slunk away, still laughing, with his sheep following faithfully behind.

My breath was heaving, hot, when Astrid put her hand on my arm, pulling me back slightly.

"Are we sending them to the cages?"

I didn't answer.

"This is the worst day of my life!" Fishlegs' voice was wailing, somewhere behind us. "We're never gonna see our dragons again!"

I swallowed. "No," I said slowly. "No. I'm not letting this happen to Toothless." At the sound of his name, my dragon came up to me

suddenly, his head slinking down to look at me from below, those eyes wide and concerned, his tongue still licking off fish taste from his jawline. I looked at him, at those beautiful scales, the sheen of life in them, the way his body heaved in its movement, the slender powerful wings, and the growl in his throat, that tender, loving, lilting hum of humanity in his voice.

He wasn't just a dragon. No dragon was. And they weren't killers. They deserved better than what they were being treated with now. I looked at the village, my family and friends shouting at the flying creatures attacking the food stores. I could feel they were close to taking their weapons out and having at them the way they did in the past. In the fury of the moment, it felt like dragon versus human again, and who could blame them? It was that way for hundreds of years.

But I turned around and faced the people under me, maybe the only ones who still wanted their dragons now. (Probably an exaggeration, but was I going door-to-door to snuff out the folks who thought this move was wrong?)

"We are not locking them up," I said, convicted.

Astrid tilted her head, gave me a look that read deep into her soul. She was impressed, irritated, curious. Snotlout, his head down and his fists clenched, looked up at me, eyes narrow, still not sure what to make of this. Fishlegs looked at me, wondering how it was that I was going to defy my own father.

I didn't know how myself. I never liked to, and never wanted to, but sometimes you just gotta show someone what they need to know before they can believe you.

"Look. Maybe Mildew has a point. A dragon's gonna do what he does naturally. We just have to adjust to that and learn how to use it." I leapt forward, threw my legs over Toothless and waved my arm for the others. "Get your dragons. I'll tell you what to do when we're up."

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Dragons only need to find a place to expend all that negative energy. If not on our storage houses, then why not in getting things into those storage houses? The twins had their Zippleback hunt yaks on the north side, Snotlout had Hookfang scare up fish from the sea. Toothless blasted hogs from the forest. Meatlug helped plant Mildew's crops. It was all about channeling that energy into something useful, using what a dragon does best and making it work with humankind. In a couple hours, our five dragons had hunted schools of fish and hundreds of animals, and scorched old farmland. We'd captured livestock, replenished the fish supply, helped plant the next crop of vegetables, showed to a bunch of folks on the ground how the dragons' power can be used for good things, and not merely destruction. It was a good run for a first time - and for just a handful of dragons. I knew we still needed to find outlets for the energy of more of the dragons, and I still believed the true solution was a one-to-one relationship between every Viking and every dragon on the island.

The sun was setting by the time we landed, in the plaza, and I was

pleased that the kids not only followed my lead, but enjoyed doing it. I found Astrid and angled Toothless to land near Stormfly, landing with a thump. Toothless nuzzled into me as I hopped off him.

She eyed me, smirked a smile my way and tipped a finger to her forehead at me. "Nice going, Hiccup."

I felt a blush coming, and shrugged it off. "All in a day's work."

"Now if you'd done that on Day 1 of your Master Plan."

I chuckled, just felt relieved more than anything that something worked out. I needed to find my Dad, tell him how we got back so much of the winter's food and solved the dragon problem. And, Mildew, I wanted to tell him he had a point about dragons, and the way they couldn't be changed. It was truer than I expected. It's not about changing someone as changing with someone, working together, so that the both of you can live in a better world. Dragons aren't meant to be subdued, that power reigned in and suppressed. But it didn't have to burn villages either.

I turned around to look for my Dad when Mildew's thin shape stalked up into my eyesight suddenly. He was angry, those eyes narrow, his frizzled beard waving in the breeze. His thin fingers were clenched in a fist and he slithered up to me much faster than I expected and grabbed my arm. "Stoick knows you've disobeyed him. You, my boy, are in much-deserved trouble."

"Get your hands off Hiccup," Astrid snapped, coming to my side.

"And why should I believe you?" I shot back at Mildew, shaking my arm out from his grip.

He pulled away, leaned on his staff. "Yer father told me to get you to the Kill Ring. He looked mad." He leaned in to my face. "And you thought you could get away with it." He laughed, that thin icky chuckle that sent a chill up my spine.

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Mildew was right. My Dad did not look happy when he ordered me and the kids into the Kill Ring, when he ordered our five dragons to be led into the cages nearly all of them had once lived in, during the War. There was a collection of villagers at the Ring too, and this strangely felt like some archaic punishment ritual. Mildew was grinning at the top of the arena, his trusty sheep gazing down with him, and I could tell from here that the spindly old man was bragging to his neighbor spectators about whatever lies he was capable of. I slumped my shoulders, shook my head. Those old memories of being made an example of in front of the tribe - the lip lashing, the sense of shame. But I felt different today, because this time I knew I was right. And the kids, they didn't deserve to be here, to get whatever was coming to me. This was my idea, my responsibility. Dad had wanted me to take on that didn't he?

Dad strode into the Ring now, that step spelling "chief" more than "father." Gobber followed close behind, his scowl severe. "I didn't see those dragons in cages, Hiccup," Stoick started, his voice slow

and calm. I stared up at him, gathering courage. I'd let him have his say, and then I'd speak. His voice grew louder. "You brought the people I put under you into your scheme and disobeyed me. You all need to face the consequences--" He shouted the word. "-of such willful disobedience."

"But I'm too pretty for jail!"

"Hah! Where'd you hear that?!"

"Ugh."

Astrid nudged her head to me, giving me a look that read a quiet support. I nudged my head to her, looked back to Dad, tapped my hand on my chest. "Dad, if anyone should get in trouble because of what happened, it should just be me. They're not responsible."

"Everyone here is responsible."

"I ordered them to do it."

He narrowed his eyes at me. There was a pause and I knew this was my moment. I gestured with my hands, getting the words out through them somehow. "I'm the one who gave them the idea to disobey, I told them to fly on their dragons, and I told them not to cage them up. But Dad, did you see what we did?" I flapped my arm past the Ring. "We collected more than half of our lost food supply. And all because of them." I pointed to the dragons that were thrown into the cages, to Toothless who was gazing at me still questioning why this was happening to him. "We used the dragons' power, Dad, for useful things. I don't know why the dragons around town are acting up right now, and I don't know why they're attacking the village suddenly, but I do know this. That if we kick them out now, things are only going to get worse and they'll stop trusting us. And we need their trust, Dad, because that's the only way any dragon is going to be tame around here."

I put my hands down, looked up at my father. He didn't interrupt me while I was speaking, even as my voice shook with certainty. He was listening to me, and that surprised me. Not because he didn't do that before but because I knew this was the kind of speech he normally would push aside if I were the same person I was during the War. But we'd both changed since that time.

He looked to the dragons in the cages, conferred with Gobber for a whispered moment, glancing back at me. I could feel Astrid behind me, as she reached out and placed a hand on my shoulder. I looked back at her, but she wasn't looking at me, was watching her chief with her head held high, her brilliant blue eyes bright in the coming twilight.

"Hiccup."

I looked up, saw my Dad coming towards me. Astrid backed away and I stepped up, looked up into his dark eyes. "Hiccup, remember when I asked you to take charge, to be responsible for something?"

I nudged my head down. The day he put me in charge of the teens.

He looked down at me, those eyes saying things I couldn't quite make out. He pursed his lips and nodded, his big beard shifting gently. He was thinking, or composing words. Or telling me. Sometimes our conversations were like that. A nudge, a nod, a grunt of approval. But this time he cleared his throat, put his arms out to the circle of the ring. "I'm giving you this Kill Ring," he said, slowly.

I scrunched up my brows. "Why?"

"As a place to train your dragons." He avoided looking at my eyes. "Today was a hard day, and you still disobeyed me." At this he glanced pointedly at me. "But maybe you have a point about dragons . . . and our food supply. Gobber told me about your progress, and reports on how you accomplished that."

I breathed quietly.

"I'll give you another chance. Here, in this Ring. Your own Dragon Training Academy." He turned away from me, shouted for his men to release the dragons from their cages. I was still stunned a little, by Dad's change of mind, and an Academy - for me? My own, under my command. I found my father, and as my friends welcomed back their dragons with whoops of cheers and yells of "We got the Ring! Buddy we're back! Those cells stink don't they?" . . .

I found my Dad and put my small hand on his big arm. "Thanks, Dad."

He patted my hand, slipped it off and looked out at the Kill Ring. "Take care of this, Hiccup. Be the best trainer you can be." He gazed down at me, and I knew he was thinking about the day he built this, and the words he told me once long ago. I'd changed a lot of things around here, but I didn't change one thing. My Dad always wanted to be proud of me, for me to be the best of whatever I did. "You can be sure of that, Dad."

Something nudged behind me suddenly, and the growl was unmistakable. I whirled. "Hey Bud!" I threw my arms around his head and he half-lifted me from the ground in his excitement to be in close contact again. I fell on the stone with a wallop and he messed up my hair until I finally got to my feet. My eyes glanced up and I saw Mildew atop there, scowling and pounding his staff madly. He was shouting something, ignored in the crowd, barely audible in my ears.

"I'll get those dragons yet!"

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And so it was that I got the Kill Ring for my very own Dragon Training Academy, how I became the official designated leader of that Academy, how I spent less time at Gobber's blacksmith shop and more time growing into my role as Berk's Dragon Trainer. How I got to spend more time on Toothless, showing people how to fly and how to bond with their creatures.

"Berk Dragon Academy," Astrid hummed as our dragons hung up the circular crest I designed and carved myself onto the front of the Kill Ring entrance. "I like the sound of that." She punched me violently and I held my arm, out of instinct more than pain and she

laughed at me, smiling.

Some things never change.

End
file.